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Reading Researchers in Search of Common Ground: The Expert Study Revisited

About the Author(s)

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Keywords

teacher education, reading wars, whole language, balanced literacy, phonics debate



READING RESEARCHERS IN SEARCH OF COMMON GROUND: THE EXPERT STUDY REVISITED

Rona F. Flippo (2012).

Book Review

by

Tiffany A. Flowers, Georgia State University Perimeter College

The purpose of this book review was to analyze the main arguments regarding literacy instruction from various paradigms of research. The Foreword of this text was written by Dr. Patricia Edwards the Past President of the Literacy Research Association. As Dr. Edwards pointedly reveals in her endorsement of this text, "Reading researchers must find some common ground in order to provide teachers with the necessary strategies to teach children reading." Dr. Edwards takes a strong stance on the reading wars debate. This foreword leaves readers with key questions that are answered throughout the reading of this text such as, what is whole language? Is it a teaching method? Philosophy? Or is it both? Are proponents of phonics really only teaching letters and sounds? What about comprehension? Language development? During the reading and review of this work, it was clear that the search for common answers to many of the aforementioned questions were answered.

Organization of the Text

This book was divided into three parts and consists of twenty-two succinct chapters. The first section was dedicated to the viewpoints of literacy from different experts in the field. The second section of the book was related to what practitioners and researchers currently know about literacy. The third section of the book focused solely on researchers finding a common ground on literacies most pressing problems. Rather, than focusing on a chapter by chapter synopsis of this text, it was more pertinent to focus on an overview of the text sections and discuss recommendations.

Part I – Viewpoints on Literacy

This section focuses on the various viewpoints of researchers. Chapter one of this text opens with the author of this edited text Flippo discussing the critical need for this historical text. Much of what Flippo contends related to the political battles in reading is accurate. Many researchers in the area of reading spent much of their time asserting their philosophies of education. However, there was little common ground for reading research making it difficult for parents, educators, and children learning to read. Richard Anderson confirms this point as he discusses his research after writing, *Becoming a nation of readers*. Other authors featured in this section confirm the divergent viewpoints and discuss the lack of progress students have made in the area of literacy, such as Frank Smith, Edward Fry, Yetta Goodman, Jerome Harste, Jane Hansen, Diane DeFord, P. Davis Pearson, Rand J. Spiro, and Benjamin Forsyth.

Part II – What We Know About Literacy: Revisited

This section focused more on the literacy achievement gap, the current focus of literacy, and what researchers identify as sound practices in literacy. Researchers such as Kathryn Au, Linda Gambrell, Timothy Rasinski, and Nancy Padak focused on issues such as second language learners and literacy, home-school literacy practices, motivation and reading, struggling readers, and effective models on literacy.

Part III – Toward a Common Ground: Revisited

This section pulls together a body of research and the future direction of literacy research by examining the current issues in literacy research. All of the researchers that contributed to this work were prompted to discuss the most important issues related to literacy. The issues were then ranked and discussed in detail in this section. Some of the issues discussed included standardized testing, struggling readers, second language issues, and effective instruction. Researchers that contributed to the work in this section included Maryann Mraz, Richard T. Vacca, D. Ray Reutzel, John A. Smith, and Rona Flippo.

Recommendations

Overall, this book is a critical read for every graduate student in the field of literacy. This book demonstrates more than anything the glaring inconsistencies, divergent viewpoints, and opposing views of literacy researchers. Most graduate students taking seminars in literacy should read this text in a Foundations of Literacy course. Understanding the background of literacy researchers, varying philosophies, and literacy theories will assist graduate students as they decipher historical and current research published in the last thirty years in the area of literacy.

Reference

Flippo, R. F. (2012). *Reading researchers in search of common ground: The expert study revisited*. Routledge: New York, 370 pp., \$59.95, (softcover).